

Message Text

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PAGE 01 GUATEM 03395 242002Z

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ACTION ARA-20

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H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3475

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 3395

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT GT

SUBJECT: ATTACK AGAINST PLANNING COUNCIL DIRECTOR GERT ROSENTHAL

REF: GUATEMALA 3387

1. DURING CHANCE MEETING AFTERNOON OF JUNE 22, FEDERICO FAHSEN, ROSENTHAL'S DEPUTY AND CLOSE COLLABORATOR ON PLANNING COUNCIL, GAVE EMBOFF FOLLOWING DETAILS ON ATTACK AGAINST ROSENTHAL. ATTACK ACTUALLY OCCURRED AT 9:30 A.M. SATURDAY, JUNE 15, AS ROSENTHAL DRIVING DOWN AVENIDA LAS AMERICAS ON WAY TO OFFICE. FAHSEN SAID HE WAS ONE OR TWO MINUTES BEHIND ROSENTHAL IN HIS OWN CAR, AND WHILE HE DID NOT SEE OR HEAR ATTACK, HE CAME UPON ROSENTHAL'S CAR SHORTLY AFTER THE INCIDENT.

2. ROSENTHAL TOLD HIM ASSAILANTS' CAR BEGAN FIRING AS THEY APPROACHED HIM FROM REAR AND CONTINUED FIRING AS THEY PASSED. FIRST BULLET ENTERED REAR WINDOW AND LODGED IN HEADREST BEHIND ROSENTHAL'S HEAD, WITH BULLET APPARENTLY BEING STOPPED BY METAL BAR IN HEADREST. ANOTHER BOUNCED OFF STEERING COLUMN. FAHSEN, WHO NOTED ROSENTHAL APPEARED MUCH MORE CALM AND COMPOSED THAN HE HIMSELF FELT AT THE MOMENT, SAID ROSENTHAL TOLD HIM THAT WHEN FIRING STARTED, HE THOUGHT IT WAS JUST FIREWORKS UNTIL GLASS IN CAR STARTED SHATTERING AROUND HIM.

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PAGE 02 GUATEM 03395 242002Z

3. ACCORDING FAHSEN, ON TUESDAY FOLLOWING INCIDENT ROSENTHAL

HAD DIFFICULT INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT-ELECT LAUGERUD, WHO ATTEMPTED CONVINCE HIM REMAIN ON AS HEAD OF PLANNING COUNCIL. ROSENTHAL, DESPITE LAUGERUD'S OPEN APPEAL TO HIS PATRIOTISM AND GOOD OF THE COUNTRY, TOLD LAUGERUD THAT UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES, HE COULD NOT REMAIN WITH GOVERNMENT IN ANY CAPACITY. WHEN LAUGERUD OFFERED PROVIDE ROSENTHAL WITH HEAVY PROTECTION, LATTER REPLIED THAT HE AND HIS FAMILY COULD NOT LIVE THAT WAY. FAHSEN CONFIRMED THAT ROSENTHAL PLANS TO LEAVE COUNTRY SOON. FAHSEN ADDED THAT INCIDENT HAD ALSO CONVINCED HIM THAT HE HIMSELF COULD NOT ACCEPT ANY POSITION IN LAUGERUD GOVERNMENT.

4. FAHSEN SAID THAT WHILE SOME GOVERNMENT SPOKESMEN LIKE MINISTER OF DEFENSE RUBIO ARE FOLLOWING USUAL LINE THAT "EXTREME LEFT" WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR ATTACK, LAUGERUD, DURING INTERVIEW WITH ROSENTHAL, DID NOT ATTEMPT TAKE THIS TACK, BUT RATHER APPEARED AGREE EXTREME RIGHT PROBABLY RESPONSIBLE. DAY AFTER INTERVIEW WITH ROSENTHAL, LAUGERUD, IN PRESS STATEMENT, WHEN LEAVING INTERVIEW WITH MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT, SAID HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD FIGHT TERRORISM, WHETHER IT ORIGINATED FROM THE RIGHT OR THE LEFT. STATEMENT PROBABLY PROMPTED BY ROSENTHAL INCIDENT.

5. FAHSEN SAID HE SERIOUSLY CONCERNED ABOUT FUTURE, IN THAT HE FELT LAUGERUD WOULD HAVE DIFFICULTY GETTING GOOD PEOPLE TO SERVE WITH HIM. HE NOTED THAT WHILE AT THE MOMENT EVERYONE SPECULATING AND WORRYING ABOUT WHO WOULD BE CABINET MINISTERS, IT REALLY TOOK ABOUT 300 GOOD MEN TO RUN THE GOVERNMENT EFFICIENTLY-VICE MINISTERS, HEADS OF AUTONOMOUS AGENCIES, DEPARTMENT HEADS, ETC. HE SAID THAT WHILE IT VERY POSSIBLE LAUGERUD COULD COME UP WITH CAPABLE MINISTERS, HE DOUBTED THAT LAUGERUD COULD FIND ENOUGH GOOD PEOPLE TO STAFF ALL OR EVEN A MAJORITY OF THE POSITIONS BELOW MINISTERIAL RANK.

6. COMMENT: EMBASSY AGREES WITH FAHSEN. WE BELIEVE LAUGERUD WOULD HAVE HAD DIFFICULTY FINDING ENOUGH CAPABLE PEOPLE TO STAFF KEY JOBS (AS DID PRESIDENT ARANA) WITHOUT THE ROSENTHAL INCIDENT. THE ATTACK ON THE PLANNING COUNCIL
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PAGE 03 GUATEM 03395 242002Z

CHIEF WILL MAKE HIS TASK THAT MUCH MORE DIFFICULT.
MELOY

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